

Teaching history in the middle school: building knowledge through skills

Shared Vision: An Australian curriculum P-12
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Goal...historical understanding

- ❑ Explicit teaching of history as a discipline in the middle years is long overdue
- ❑ But, how to do it??
 - Transmission teaching?
 - Student-centred, inquiry-based teaching?
 - What about “relevance” – does all history teaching have to be relevant to today’s 12 year olds?
- ❑ What about the skills of historical inquiry?
- ❑ Build knowledge of the discipline → **historical understanding**, NOT focusing only on content



2 approaches (Marsh, 2008, p. 10-11)

□ **Academic rationalism**

- Cultural transmission
- Disciplines based on well-established body of knowledge regarded as “the truth”
- Content-based
- Reinforce notions of the status quo

□ **Social reconstructionism**

- Issues-based
- Links to real world experiences of students
- Integrated/multi-disciplinary approaches
- Inquiry-based learning
- Social change



Consider...

- From a student's point of view....
 - What is valued in the short term?
 - What is the enduring value of knowing content?
 - **“Why are we learning this Miss?”**
- From an educator's point of view....
 - What do we value?
 - Is it time to re-consider the emphasis on skills (in SOSE/history)?
 - Will there be any room to exercise teacher professionalism in choosing appropriate content in a prescriptive curriculum?
 - Non-specialist teachers' subject knowledge?



Shulman (1986, 1987)

- ❑ Grossman, Wilson and Shulman define content knowledge for teaching, as “the ‘stuff’ of a discipline: factual information, organizing principles, central concepts” (1989, p. 27) and assert it is central to teaching (1989, p. 28). The ability to define concepts separately within the field, as well as relationships with concepts outside the discipline characterises this type of knowledge.



Shulman's “missing paradigm”

- ❑ Substantive and syntactical knowledge base of teaching has been ignored.
- ❑ “Mere content knowledge is likely to be as useless pedagogically as content-free skill. But to blend properly the two aspects of a teacher's capacities requires that we pay as much attention to the content as we have recently devoted to the elements of teaching process” (Shulman, 1986, p, 8).



Shulman: Pedagogical content knowledge

- **Distinctive body of professional knowledge for teaching**
- “represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (Shulman, 1987, p. 8).
- **Considers needs and abilities of students**
- Pedagogical content knowledge is “the category most likely to distinguish the understanding of the content specialist from that of the pedagogue” (1987, p. 8).



National history curriculum

- ❑ What position should middle school teachers take?
- ❑ Content specialists? Process?
- ❑ What scope is there for that “blending of content and pedagogy”, for developing pedagogical content knowledge for teaching history in the middle years?



What is history?? See *Shaping Paper*

Content: 2.3 History is the study of the past. It provides knowledge, understanding and appreciation of previous events, people, practices and ideas. It orders them, renders them intelligible and discerns patterns of continuity and change. It provides the means whereby individual and collective identities are formed and sustained. It enriches the present and illuminates the future.

Process: 2.6 Historical inquiry involves the retrieval, comprehension and interpretation of sources, and judgment, guided by principles that are intrinsic to the discipline. It yields knowledge that is based on the available evidence, but remains open to further debate and future reinterpretation. It develops in students the ability to recognise varying interpretations of history and to determine the difference between fact, opinion and bias. (ACARA, 2009)



Draft History curriculum rationale

History is a disciplined inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination. It develops understanding of cultural, social and political events, processes and issues that have shaped humanity from earliest times. It enriches our appreciation of how the world and its people have changed, and the significant continuities that exist into the present. In this way, the study of history enables students to contribute more effectively to creating the future (ACARA, 2010, p. 1).

- What elements of this statement relate it to the academic rationalist approach?
- What elements relate to social reconstructionist approach?



Historical knowledge and understanding

History disciplinary concepts (ACARA, 2010, p. 2)

- ❑ Evidence
- ❑ Continuity and change
- ❑ Cause and effect
- ❑ Significance
- ❑ Empathy
- ❑ Perspectives
- ❑ Contestability



Explicit teaching of history

- ❑ Understand the present better
- ❑ Contribute to creating the future
- ❑ Teach disciplinary concepts

- ❑ So, does it matter that in middle school history, skills has taken precedence over content?
- ❑ How important is it to study the same person, event, issue?
- ❑ What is the role of **significance**?
- ❑ Who decides?

Prescriptive curriculum vs teacher professional judgement: See Year 7

- **11. Depth Study 2. The Ancient World – Egypt OR Greece OR Rome**

A chronological account of the significant periods, events and people

- Elaborations

Examining the duration of periods of stability and change, events that were influential (political, military, geographical) and the motivations and actions of individuals and groups in key events (ACARA, 2010, p. 23)

Historical questions and research

Formulate inquiry questions and plan an inquiry

Elaborations

Experimenting with different words/phrases/historical concepts, when drafting a question, to develop a research focus

Posing a key question such as, how were the pyramids built?, and identifying related questions to inform the inquiry, including: what evidence is there? what theories have been developed?



Types of history (Hoepper, 2004)

- Old History:

- Eurocentric and celebratory
- Great men; great events
- War histories

- New History:

- Historical knowledge is debatable; tentative
- Emphasis on historical inquiry
- Students to construct own knowledge of the past



Middle years

Foster thinking skills to provide ways of thinking
historically as a foundation for learning



Historical literacy – involves (Hoepper, 2006)

- Historical literacy involves ‘knowledge’
 - Knowing what ‘history’ means; key concepts; key information
- ‘Reading’ history; “doing history”
- Inquiry into the past using sources
- Empathy
- Values
- Expressing historical knowledge
- Applying historical knowledge to everyday life

Historical literacy involves ‘knowledge’

(Hoepper, 2006)

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- **Knowing what “history” means: 3 meanings**
 - 1) knowing “what happened” : chronology
 - 2) constructed, interpretation of the past
 - 3) describes what historians do. ie., the process of constructing historical knowledge
 - **Knowledge of key concepts in history**, eg., change, continuity, cause, effect, motive, agency
 - **Knowing important information to support claims about the past**, eg., names, dates, places, locations



Types of evidence (Young, 2004)

- ❑ Written: diaries, letters, acts, laws, memorials, gravestones, poems, songs, graffiti, news media etc
- ❑ Archaeological
- ❑ Artefacts
- ❑ Visual: Photos, paintings, cartoons, murals
- ❑ Oral accounts
- ❑ Landscapes
- ❑ Customs and ceremonies

Inquire into the past using sources

- Sources: primary and secondary
- Primary sources are fragments of the past, but no more authoritative or “better” than secondary sources
- All sources are “partial”, ie.,
 - only part of all evidence that ever existed
 - reflect the standpoint of the author
- Evaluate all sources for usefulness as a source of evidence about the past: weigh the evidence
- Use good inquiry questions: eg.,
 - What happened at the Eureka Stockade? → descriptive question
 - To what extent were miners justified in taking up arms? → involves debates about motives, causes and effects (*adapted from Hoepper, 2006*)



Historical inquiry involves teaching MY students to ...

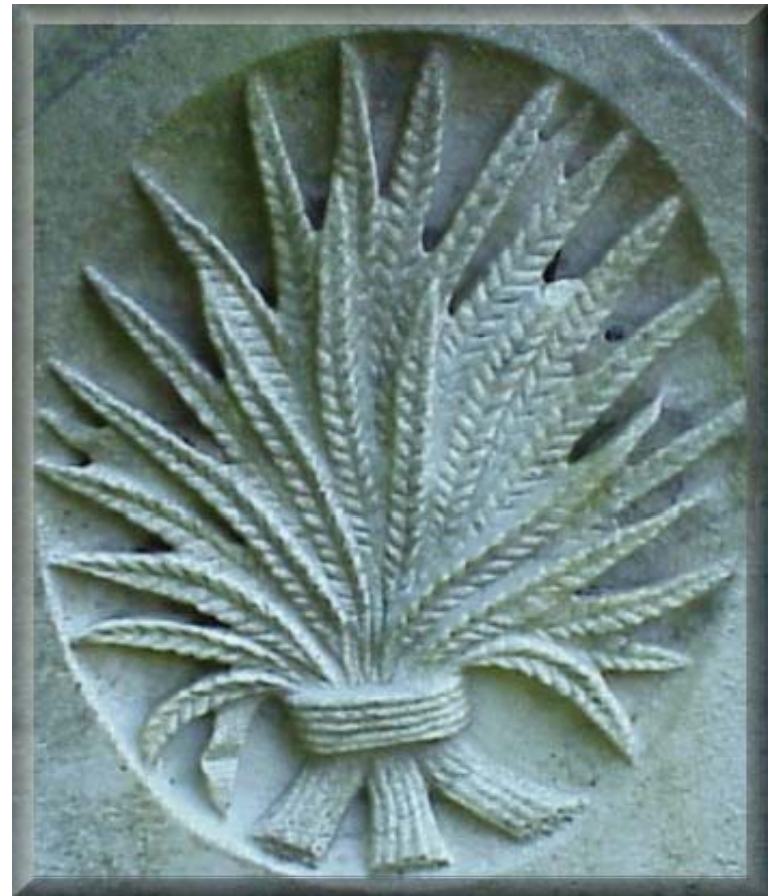
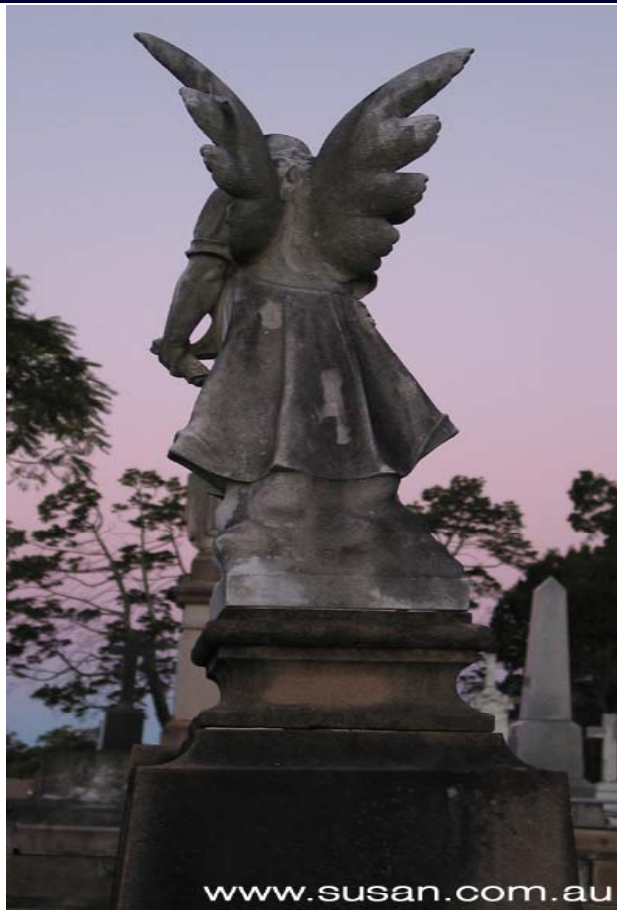
- Use a range of sources:
 - primary sources, secondary sources, news media, artefacts, field studies, oral sources, visual records
- Weigh / debate evidence
- Construct historical explanations
- Read other historians' views
- Develop empathy with the past
- Interpret the past



Questions for MY history teachers

- ❑ What is the role of skills vs content knowledge in middle years history?
 - How important is the content?
 - How much should teachers emphasise skills?
 - How much time should be given to teaching the skills and procedures of the discipline?
 - Can we teach core content and historical understanding by teaching skills?

Weighing the evidence: historical site





Weighing the evidence: artefacts

- ❑ What is it?
- ❑ Who used / made / built it?
- ❑ Why was it used / made / built ?
- ❑ What was it made from?
- ❑ How does it “work”?
- ❑ What can we learn from similar objects?
- ❑ Do we have or use the same sorts of things now?
- ❑ Why is it still here, in this condition, now?



History as interpretation; History as concepts, ideas

- ❑ These artefacts are from the same historical site.
- ❑ What observations can we make about the people who created these artefacts?
- ❑ Religion? Culture? Technology? Values?
- ❑ What observations can we make about the time in which they lived?

Year 9: Depth Study 2: Asia and the Pacific World

14. Depth Study 2. Asia and the Pacific World

The consequences of contact, intended and unintended, between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Europeans in Australia, and in ONE other part of the Asia- Pacific.

Elaborations

Analysing the personal experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as described by themselves in primary and secondary sources

2. Historical questions and research

- Identify and locate relevant historical sources and information, using ICT and other methods

3. Analysis and use of sources

- **Identify the origin, purpose and context of historical sources**

5. Analysis and use of sources

- Draw conclusions about the reliability and usefulness of sources

Elaborations

- **Understanding that the reliability and usefulness of sources depends on the questions asked of the source, eg an account questions may be one-sided but may therefore be useful for revealing prevailing attitudes in the past.**



Weighing evidence

- Letter from Office of the Administrator, Darwin, 1911
 - Documentary

- Images of Aboriginal children: 1928; 1937; 1950; undated – more recent?
 - 4 visual; builds sense of time

- News report of account from aboriginal welfare patrol officer during the 1950s and 60s based on interview conducted in 2008 after the Apology
 - Recent news report



Proposal to take Aboriginal children to new NT settlement, 1911. Office of the Administrator, Darwin, Sept 12, 1911

Sir,

I have the honor to refer to your telegram of the 8th instant with reference to the suggestion of the Chief Protector of Aborigines regarding the establishment of an Aboriginal settlement.

The number of aboriginal children that would be provided for in the proposed institution would depend upon the policy of the Government in regard to half caste children. In my opinion one of the first works to be undertaken is to gather in all half caste children who are living with aborigines.

The police could do most this work. No doubt the mothers would object and there would probably be an outcry from well meaning people about depriving the mother of her child but the future of the children should I think outweigh all other considerations. It is quite impossible to state the number that would be so gathered in.

There might also be some pure blooded children obtained.

(<http://econtent.thelearningfederation.edu.au/ec/viewing/R10595/index.html>)

Children and nuns at the Catholic Mission on Bathurst Island in 1928. Photo from the Bleakley collection thanks to the Northern Territory Library and Information



Little Flower Aboriginal Mission on the outskirts of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory in 1937. A crowd is outside a corrugated iron building. Most of the people in the photograph, including adults and children, are unidentified Indigenous people. In a Catholic priest's cassock, on the left-hand side is Father Paddy Moloney, who founded the Mission, and on the right-hand side is Brother Ed Bennett. A third European man crouching down in the middle is Frank McGarry, a lay missionary




Photograph: *School, Mornington Island*, 1950. Courtesy of the State Library of Queensland and the community of Mornington Island.



Creative expression at Bungalow settlement school in Alice Springs. Photo from the Joyce Gilbert collection thanks for the Northern Territory Library and Information Service.





Harry Kitching, 88 years-old, aboriginal welfare patrol officer during the 1950s and 60s in western NSW and in the Northern Territory.

- What in hindsight is considered an outrage, back then was quite literally a black and white issue. This week's acknowledgement of the trauma suffered by the Stolen Generations isn't shared by everyone. Some of those whose job it was to implement the policy, still believe sincerely they were rescuing children, and not stealing them.
- A former patrol officer who removed part-indigenous children from their families said he supports the national apology but believes that the policy helped some people and that not all children were stolen. Interview 2008

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/02/13/2162760.htm?site=westqld>



Harry Kitching remembers... (as reported)

- He said he believed that quite a few benefited by being removed and in his opinion, not all children were stolen. "It may have started off that way," he said. "That after the war - particularly in the Territory where there was a lot of part-Aboriginal children who's fathers were ex-service and when they brought in this Act that part-Aboriginal children had to be removed from the stations, well a lot of them were taken by police - they weren't taken by patrol officers. That's where they get the idea that everybody was stolen - they were not all stolen."

History as interpretation and narrative; History as debate

- What does the letter in 1911 tell us about the government's reasons?
- Whose views are stated in the letter?
- What do the images tell us about the lives of the children?
- What do the images tell us about their surroundings?
- From the limited number of images, what feelings are displayed by the children?
- What is the role of their carers? Is there enough evidence about the carers?
- What is the standpoint of the photographer in image 3? How is it different from image 1? What can be inferred about the lives of the children in image 1 and 4?
- What can we learn about the intentions of the people who cared for the children in photographs 3 and 4?
- In the 2008 interview with Mr Kitching he recalls events 40 – 50 years ago. What was his standpoint in the 1960s? What is it in 2008?
- Is the 2008 report of the interview with Mr Kitching a reliable source? What could compromise its reliability?



History as interpretation and narrative; History as debate

- What can be reliably inferred from this evidence about the stolen generations in Australia?
 - The consequences of contact, intended and unintended, between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Europeans in Australia
 - Analysing the issues of Indigenous displacement... (ACARA, 2010, p. 36)
- What historical narrative can be constructed from this limited evidence?
 - Developing an historical argument that identifies different possibilities in interpretation and argues a particular point of view with consistent reference to the evidence available (ACARA, 2010, p. 36)



Refer to: Skills of historical inquiry

- ❑ What type of evidence is this?
- ❑ What questions can we ask? (History as inquiry)
- ❑ What explanations can we come up with?
(Historical reasoning)
- ❑ How accurate are our interpretations? (History as debate; history as critical thinking)
- ❑ What can we know about people and life in the past from these images? (History as explanation; Historicity)



Historicity: Students develop empathy in stages...

(Reynolds, 2009)

Different levels of empathetic understanding:

- 1/ Students will repeat what happened but do not attempt to explain it.
- 2/ They explain the behaviour in their own way but do not attempt to say why it seemed stupid or unlike how we may behave now.
- 3/ Students do not think people in the past were stupid, but behaved as they did because they were not as clever as us.
- 4/ Assume people in the past were much like people today
- 5/ Project themselves into the past to attempt to understand it
- 6/ Recognise the need to change perspective to that of the other person.



Historicity: developing empathy

Teachers should

- Encourage students to project themselves into the past to understand the behaviour of people who were different.
- Recognise that students need to change perspective to that of the other person. Encourage this shift.
- Teach students to avoid judging the past through eyes of the present.



Conclusion: build teacher capacity

- Explicit history teaching
 - procedural knowledge AND concepts, facts, events, people, movements, issues.
- Build own pedagogical content knowledge in history → quality teaching



Teacher professionalism

- **New opportunity for middle school teacher professionalism –**
 - Value substantive knowledge of content and procedures of history as a distinctive body of knowledge
 - Content knowledge is back!
 - Avoid privileging process over content
 - Value the process and experience of pedagogical content knowledge for teaching middle years history
 - Look for opportunities to exercise “professional discretion” in a prescriptive curriculum context
 - Teachers have a decisive role in guiding students regarding questions of significance, empathy, perspectives and contestability

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